DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 268 CG 015 252

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TITLE Do Values Change in an Encounter Group? An Empirical Investigation.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 29p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; *Group Dynamics; *Individual Development; Interpersonal Competence; Interpersonal Relationship; *Moral Values; *Participant Satisfaction; Perception; Self Actualization; *Self Evaluation (Groups); *Sensitivity Training

ABSTRACT

Encounter groups represent an attempt to apply group methods for the enhancement of personal awareness and the acceleration of personal growth among "normal" people. The extent to which an individual's moral values are modified by disclosure and discussion of these values in an encounter group setting was investigated with a group of nine undergraduates who met for 16 hours distributed over six sessions. Pretests and posttests of the Rettig and Pasamanick Moral Values Scale, the Machiavellianism Scale, and the Attitudes Toward Encounter Groups questionnaire were completed by group members. At the end of each session, members completed a Post-Session Group Evaluation. Results indicated no significant changes in members' general value systems; however the subjects tended to view encounter groups positively, and to see themselves as benefitting from the group experience. Results support the notion of using leader structure to shape appropriate group behaviors, followed by fading leader direction. (Author/NRB)

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ED203268

CG 015252

Do Values Change in an Encounter Group?

An Empirical Investigation

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Do Values Change in an Encounter Group?

An Empirical Investigation

While group therapy was reported in formal use as early as 1903 (Ruitenbeck, 1970), only since World War II has group therapy achieved prominence in the psychotherapy field (Ullmann & Krasner, 1975). In the burgeoning field of behavior therapy (Annis & Baker, 1976), groups have been used in tasks like training assertion and other skills (Liberman, King, DeRisi, & McCann, 1975) as well as in more clearly "therapy" situations such as training self-control (Wollersheim, 1970), rational-emotive therapy (Jacobs & Croake, 1976), and systematic desensitization (Paul & Shannon, 1966). Group therapy has also been used as part of traditional psychotherapy (Yalom, 1970).

One branch of the group movement has attempted to apply group methods to increase personal awareness and accelerate personal growth among "normal" people. The focus of these groups, variously labeled encounter or sensitivity training groups, has generally been on experience and current inter- and intra-personal events, and honest and open self-expression has been stressed as a medium to achieve awareness of self and others and to changing personal behavior (Liberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). Encounter groups may be regarded as entertainment, as a social movement, as a form of religion, or as a technique to change behavior (see Krasner & Ullmann, 1973, pp. 444-462, for a review).

The need to effectively assess group processes and outcome has been strongly advocated (Hartly, Roback, & Adramowitz, 1975). Even though as early as 1914 Moreno employed procedures much resembling those of modern encounter groups (Schloss, Siroka, & Siroka, 1971), the degree

to which participation in an encounter group is beneficial to or harms an individual is in contention. While Carl Rogers (1970) has suggested that encounter groups offer enormous benefits and negligable risks, others (e.g., Crawshaw, 1969; Maliver, 1973; Mann, 1970) have argued that encounter groups are essentially dangerous operations with minimal potential benefits. Nevertheless, the bulk of available reports on encounter groups consists of methodologically poor studies and unsupported anecdotes (Hartley, Roback, & Abramowitz, 1975; Marshall & Coleman, 1974). The report by Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles (1973) has been assailed by Schutz (1975) as being among the most comprehensive studies yet performed on encounter groups as well as being "a methodological morass, . . . theoretically obsolescent, and (presenting) conclusions that are almost totally unjustified" (p. 7).

If encounter groups are as effective in promoting "self actualization" of the individual as their supporters claim (e.g., Howard, 1970; Schutz, 1975), then one would expect persons who complete a course of encounter group sessions to display overt or covert changes in their personal belief system and behaviors related to those beliefs. Maslow (1954, 1965) has proposed that people meeting the criteria for self actualization tend to more readily accept themselves and others, experience a feeling of belongingness to all mankind (gemeinschaftsgefuhl) relate to others as individuals rather than as members of some particular reference group, and possess a well-developed sense of personal ethics.

In the last twenty years, a number of relatively reliable instruments

have been devised which proport to measure constructs considered important in an individual's moral beliefs and behaviors. One of these is the Rettig and Pasamanick (1959) Moral Values scale. This device seeks to assess "the individual's overt or covert evaluations of the rightness or wrongness of an event" (p. 356). Another development has been the Christie and Geis (1970) Machiavellianism Scale. This questionnaire attempts to measure the degree to which personal beliefs agree with the Michiavellian orientation; namely, believing in and desiring to use threat, deceit, and other such means to manipulate other people.

The present study attempted to determine the extent to which an individual's moral values are modified by disclosure and discussion of these values in an encounter group setting. In addition, the study sought to establish to what extent a person's Machiavellianism is reduced by membership in an encounter group. The study also endevored to indicate to what extent if any a person's attitudes about encounter groups are improved by participation in such a group.

Method

Subjects

Fourteen undergraduate psychology students at a large southern university were selected as group members. All had been members of a larger pool (N=22) who had volunteered--some with the inducement of extra academic credit--to participate in encounter groups. The 14 students included eight males, one of whom was black and another of mixed white-black ancestry, and six females, all white. One female never

attended a group meeting, and three women attended only the first session. The black male attended three sessions totalling six hours. The two women and seven men who attended all sessions were considered the subjects of this study. Demographic data for the nine subjects are presented in Table 1, and the individual interview outline is included as Appendix 1.

Leaders

The group's co-leaders were third year graduate students in clinical psychology. They were enrolled in a psychology practicum course that required them to lead encounter groups for 16 hours. While one co-leader had participated in several prior encounter groups, the other had never even observed one prior to the practicum. One leader was 30 years old, the other was 25, and both were males. Both had resided in Mississippi for two years. Both leaders regarded themselves as behaviorists.

Setting

Group meetings took place in a room of the clinical suite of the University of Mississippi Psychology Department. A portion of session 5 was conducted on the lawn behind the building. Except for the final (sixth) session, all furniture was removed from the room at the beginning of the meeting.

The room was equipped with a one-way mirror for observation by the practicum supervisor and practicum students. Portions of some sessions were videotaped for later replay to the supervisor, leaders,

Table 1

Demographic Data

Sex		
	Male	7
	Female	2
Age	($\bar{x}$=20.1 yrs.)	
	18	1
	19	2
	20	2
	21	3
	22	1
Birth order position	($\bar{x}$=2.2)	
	1	2
	2	4
	3	2
	4	1
Class		
	Freshman	3
	Sophomore	1
	Junior	2
	Senior	3
Major		
	Psychology	5
	Chemistry	2
	Premedical	1
	Accounting	1
State of residence		
	Mississippi	8
	New York	1

and others in the practicum class. The group members were informed of this procedure during the initial interviews and at the beginning of the first session.

Pre-Post Group Measures

Prior to the first session, group members completed two questionnaires. The first, the Rettig and Pasamanick (1959) Moral Values scale, consists of 50 behaviors to which the respondent is directed to indicate his opinion on a ten-point scale, with the end values anchored "least wrong" (1) and "as wrong as possible" (10). Examples of behaviors are "Kidnapping and holding a child for ransom" and "Forging a check."

The second questionnaire is the Machiavellianism Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970). This scale is composed of 20 statements drawn from or devised to reflect the opinions of Machiavelli, and responses are recorded on a six-point, agree-disagree scale.

At the first meeting, members completed an "Attitudes Toward Encounter Groups" questionnaire (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). This scale includes three sub-scales: a danger-safty dimension; a scale of social benefit; and a genuine-phony dimension. This scale was also included with the post-group assessment.

Post-Session Measures

At the end of each session, and before replacing furniture in the room, members were asked to complete a Post-Session Group Evaluation (Appendix 2), designed to assess members' opinions of the session in

terms of benefit and harm to members, likes and dislikes about group activities, structure, comfort in disclosing, and amount of time for spontaneous discussion.

A questionnaire at the end of the final session asked for the same information about the entire series of group meetings (Appendix 3).

Procedure

The group met for 16 hours. The first, second, and forth sessions were each two hours long; meeting 3 lasted three hours; session 5 was of six hours duration; and the final meeting, session 6, lasted one hour.

Session 1. Leader goals for session 1 included: establishing group norms; reducing anxiety; shaping self-disclosure and positive feedback; and providing a procedure for "zaps". Group goals were congruent with leader goals 2 and 3. The leaders presented their expectations of confidentiality and the banning of sex, drugs, and violence within the group. Members were blindfolded and milled about, meeting each other. Then blindfolds were removed and nametags distributed. Group members formed new groups in corners of the room according to various classifications with which the corners were labeled, the subgroups discussing their feelings about the classifications. The leaders described and modeled positive feedback and the use of "zaps" for verbal hits below the emotional beltline. Dyads were formed, and each pair discussed their best friends and gave positive feedback to each other. Reforming the circle, each member was asked to briefly present to the group their saddest experience, with members giving

feedback to presenters. Then, the same procedure was followed, using happiest experiences. The leader goals seemed accomplished.

Subsequent meetings followed this same basic format, with leaders summarizing the previous meeting at the beginning, followed by a nonverbal exercise, then one to three verbal exercises, and a leader summary of the meeting at the end.

Session 2. Leader goals were to reestablish the relaxed atmosphere; increase group trust; increase self-disclosure; and fade some of the leader structure. The group goals seemed the same as the leader goals. After the leader review, the group performed a group carry of members. The members then listed three positive and three negative things about themselves on a card, and one rarely revealed thing. The first six items were then read to the group. Dyads discussed the six items. The group then re-formed, and the members discussed topics created by themselves. Goals again seemed achieved.

Session 3. Leader goals, to which the members' goals seemed congruent, were to maintain the relaxed atmosphere, increase group trust, shape self-disclosure of feelings, and fade leader direction. Members in dyads performed a blindfold trust walk. The group carry was repeated for members who wanted to be carried. Members wrote three things about themselves of which they were proud, and three other items that were worries. The group discussed how to best spend it's time and their feelings of family about the group. The balance of the session was largely devoted to members discussing sex issues. Goals seemed met in

this session.

Session 4. The leaders' goal was to allow the group to set its own direction for the meeting. The members seemed to agree with this goal. The members performed a "bridge" exercise, then members held an open discussion. Topics concerned killing for one's country, sex, and the double standard. The leaders' goal seemed met.

Session 5. The leaders' goal was to allow the group to set the pace and direction for this marathon session. While the members' goals seemed generally congruent with that of the leaders, the group often seemed to prefer chosing among several leader-generated ideas to originating novel ideas. Behind the building, the group held a general discussion about their behavior in the group. Returning to the building, the group formed a series of dyads, being directed to get to know each other better. The group performed a lifeboat exercise, with five members in the boat and five membets observing. Feelings about the end of the group life were discussed, and one member brought up a family problem which the group discussed.

Session 6. This was the termination session. Members talked about their feelings about the end of the group, their feelings about each other, and what they felt they had gotten out of the group. Post-group questionnaires were distributed, members were thanked for their help, and the meeting--and group--was ended.

Results

The results of the Moral Values questionnaire (Rettig & Pasamanack, 1959) were assessed through a one-tailed correlated *t*-test in compliance with the hypothesis that group membership would reduce evaluations of the "wrongness" of behaviors. On the pretest, the members achieved a mean score of 313, and on the posttest the mean was 280. This fails to indicate any significant difference between members' Moral Value responses on the pregroup and postgroup tests (t=1.751, NS, df=8).

The members answers on the Michiavellianism Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970) were evaluated by a one-tailed correlated *t*-test to determine the degree to which Michiavellianism was reduced through group membership. The group mean was 63.3 on the pretest and 63.9 on the posttest. The results fail to show any amelioration of beliefs about Michiavellianism as a function of membership in an encounter group (t=.231, NS, df=8).

Responses on the Attitudes Towards Encounter Groups questionnaire (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973) are divided into three seperate scales. Each scale is composed of eight items, and scores can range from 8 to 40. The three scales were all evaluated by one-tailed, correlated *t*-tests consistent with the hypothesis that members would come to view encounter groups as nicer places to be.

The first scale, the Danger/Safety questionnaire, attempts to measure the extent to which a respondent sees encounter groups as safe as opposed to dangerous. Low scores indicate perception of encounter groups as safe places, and high scores suggest the respondent sees them

as dangerous. On the pretest, the mean response was 33.2, while the posttest mean was 29.4 (t=3.427, $p < .005$, df=8). This indicates that members perceived encounter groups as safer places after participating in one.

The second Attitudes Toward Encounter Groups scale is the Social Benefit survey. The group's pretest mean was 21.8, and the mean on posttest was 18.3 (t=2.37, $p < .025$, df=8), indicating that the members came to regard encounter groups as possessing greater potential social benefit after they'd participated in the series of sessions.

The third scale is the Genuine/Phoney measure. This scale attempts to assess respondents' views of encounter groups as being the locations for genuine expression of feelings as opposed to their being artifical and contrived situations. On the pretest, the group members' mean was 20.8, while the posttest mean was 16.2 (t= 2.69, $p < .025$, df=8). This indicates that the members came to view encounter groups as locations for more genuine communication than they first believed.

The pretest and posttest means for the three scales are presented graphically in Figure 1.

On the postgroup evaluation and on the various post-session questionnaires, members were asked to estimate who had benefitted most in the group and who benefitted least. The results for members who completed the group are seen in Table 2. These results indicate that some members (e.g., Russell) were seen as benefitting on a relatively consistent basis throughout the session. The table also suggests that

Figure 1

Pretest and posttest means for the three scales of the Attitudes Toward Encounter Groups questionnaire

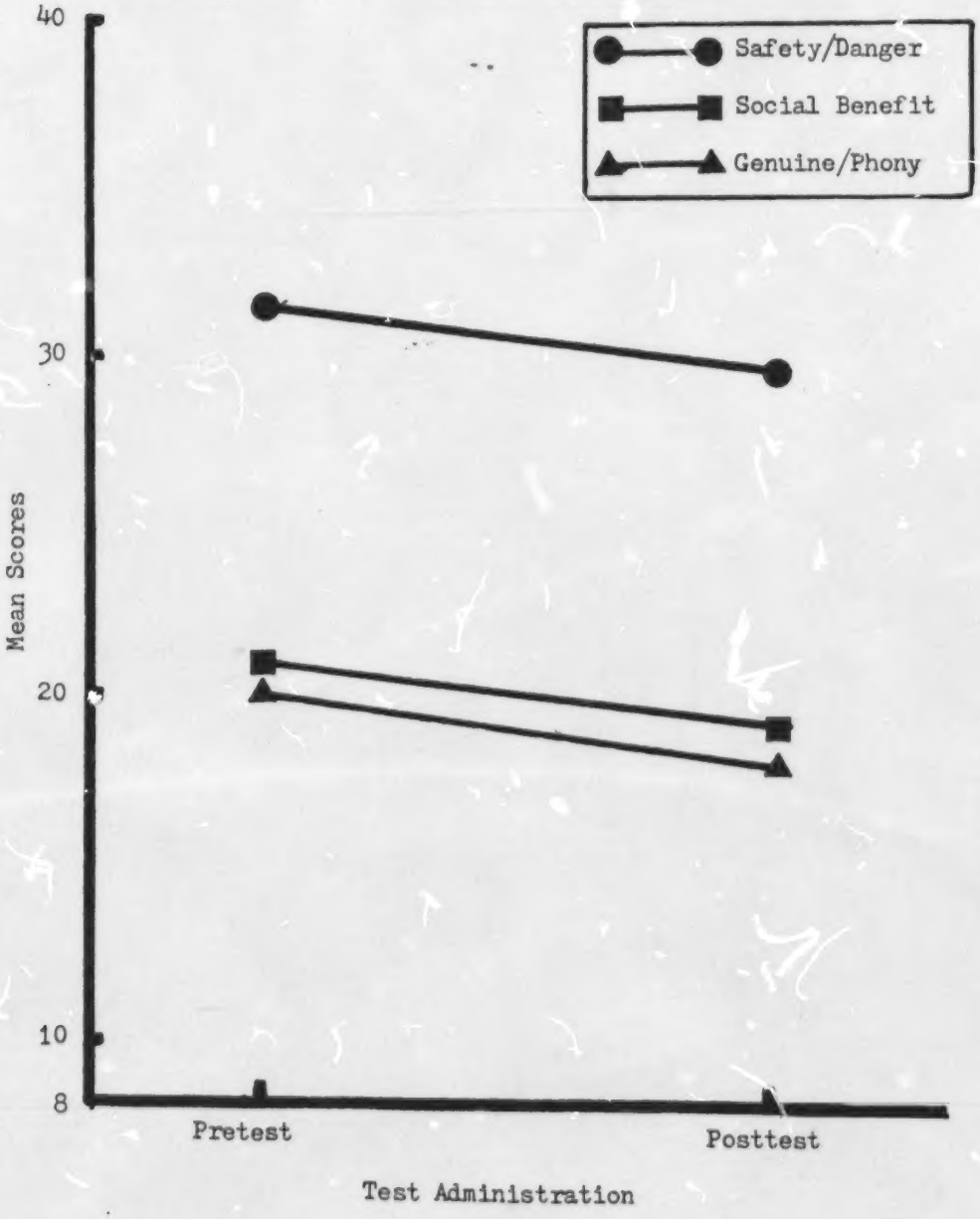

Table 2

Responses to the question on benefits to members

Seen as benefitting the most

Member	Post-session evaluations					Session Total	Post-group
	1	2	3	4	5		
Rusty	1					1	7 (inc self)
Jeff	1	1				2	6 (inc self)
Riki					5	5	6 (inc self)
Russell	2	1	1	2		6	5 (inc self)
June						0	4 (inc self)
Tony						0	2 (inc self)
Mike				1		1	1
Word		3				3	
Ralph	1				2	3	
Leader 1	1		1	1		3	1
Leader 2	1		4			5	1

Seen as benefitting the least

Member	Post-session evaluations					Session Total	Post-group
	1	2	3	4	5		
Rusty						0	1
Jeff			1			1	
Riki						0	
Russell						0	
June		1				1	
Tony		2				2	
Mike					1	1	
Word			3		1	4	2
Ralph					1	1	
Leader 1						0	
Leader 2						0	

most members saw themselves as having benefitted the most from the series of group meetings after the group ended. Among those benefitting the least, the individuals are more scattered. The session in which Word received the most votes for least benefitted was the one in which he reported being distracted because of a pending test.

Interestingly, the group was able to pick out the group's dropouts and irregular attender by the end of session 1 (data not shown). Three people cited Jan as being least benefitted by the meeting, and Donna and Deb each received one vote. None of these three attended another meeting. Lemon, who attended only two further group sessions--meetings 3 and 6--was chosen least benefitted by two people. Jan also received one vote for most benefitted. Member comments about Jan, Lemon, and Donna indicated that the three were not seen as open or being at ease with the group, while Deb was viewed as "already outgoing".

Group members were asked in the post-group questionnaire to list group events that they particularly enjoyed (See Table 3). The members presented a variety of enjoyed activities, some quite specific, such as "lifeboat", and others more general, like "groupness". Table 3 also presents the members' list of things in the group they liked least. This list, while shorter than the list of liked events, is more specific.

The final questionnaire also asked the members' opinions about the structure provided by the leaders. All nine respondents agreed that the leaders' directiveness was appropriate except for one member who

Table 3

Group members' likes and dislikes about the group (post-group evaluation)

Likes	
Group interaction	Discussing feelings
Close interaction	Making friends
Nonverbal activities (2 respondents)	Groupness
Lifeboat exercise	Family atmosphere
Dyads (3 respondents)	Getting to know people
A chance to relax	Openness
Talking to others (2 respondents)	Trying to help each other with problems

Dislikes	
Time distribution	Nonverbal exercises
Long religious discussion	Some members dominating discussion
Nothing (2 respondents)	

reported that the leaders "sometimes" were not directive enough. In response to a question requesting additional suggestions for future groups, eight members didn't respond or stated they had no advice, while one member suggested that future groups provide some "literature" for members.

No member reported believing that anyone was hurt by the group experience.

Discussion

The current results fail to support the suggestion of Lieberman et al. (1973) that significant values change as a result of experiences in encounter groups. Lieberman et al. have stated that "the overall effects of encounter groups are primarily in the Value-Attitude area . . ." (p. 116). The current study, however, found that alterations in moral values as measured by the Rettig and Pasamanick (1959) scale changed only slightly from pre- to post-group administration.

This discrepancy might be explained as a fault of the measurement device in the current study, in that the 50 items on the Moral Values scale may tap opinions about a vast number of behaviors, while very few behaviors were actually discussed in the group. However, one of the selling points of encounter groups has been that they may produce generalized changes in areas as a result of altered cognitive set about relatively global interpersonal behaviors (Schloss, Siroka, & Siroka, 1971). Thus, the current results offer no support for a view that encounter groups promote major value shifts.

Lieberman et al. (1973) have reported little change in the views encounter participants have of their interpersonal environments. They have also suggested that major unidirectional alterations in the members' non-group interpersonal behavior may be rare, in spite of occassional enthusiastic reports that major changes in interpersonal orientation may be a main outcome of group participation (see the summary by Krasner & Ullmann, 1973). The present results tend to support this finding, as no significant effects of group membership were noted in responses on the Michiavellian Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970). This would seem to extend the Lieberman et al. (1973) results, since those authors tended to use unstandardized, often original, scales in assessing interpersonal orientation, while the current study employed a more standardized instrument.

The current study does support the contention of Lieberman et al. that membership in encounter groups may lead to altered perceptions of and opinions about such groups. The opinions of the group members in the current study changed--as did those in the Lieberman report--in the direction of more positive orientations toward encounter groups. The present members came to regard groups as being more safe, more genuine, and more socially beneficial. In the current study, only one member's opinion about encounter groups moved significantly in a negative direction: he came to view such groups as less genuine. Otherwise, encounter groups appeared more attractive to group members after completion of 16 hours than prior to any hours of encounter group activity.

The results indicating that six of nine members saw themselves in the most benefitted category seems to indicate that most members left the group regarding it as a rewarding experience. It is interesting to note that the member who was rated as benefitting least from the group was one who rarely seemed to make any statements of feelings. This member's forte appeared to be reason and intellectualization, not passion, although he often appeared to be rather perceptive about issues involving other members. As one person stated in the final session, asking this member for a question was like "asking Marshal Dillon for a gunfight."

The membership's ability to select those members who would not return to subsequent meetings resembles the talent shown by the members of the Liberman et al. (1973) groups at picking out negative changers and casualties. This suggests that group members may be perceptive enough in the first session to see what the leaders could not see when screening for participants who would not benefit from encounter groups.

The activities selected by the members as most liked included verbal and nonverbal activities and both those events which were planned and others which were unplanned. This may illustrate a need for leaders to prepare a smorgasbord of potential activities for their groups, especially in early sessions. The interest in nonverbal exercises expressed by members in their final evaluations as well as in the post-session questionnaires indicates that structured nonverbal activities

may be most desirable early in the group's existence but become less needed as the group continues. This was formally verbalized by one member in session 4 as what subsequently became known to the group as "Rusty's Law": nonverbal exercises are appropriate as an inverse function of the age of the group.

Overall, the strategy of using structured exercises, both verbal and nonverbal, to shape what the leaders regarded as appropriate group behaviors--relaxed atmosphere, trust, self-disclosure, positive feedback, making feeling statements--appears to have been successful. Although some group resistance was encountered when the leaders' direction was faded, the results seem to indicate that careful attention to shaping appropriate norms early in the group's life may produce, as it did with this group, a group in which no one was an apparent casualty and in which two-thirds of the members saw themselves as benefitting most.

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Appendix 1

Screening Outline

I. Fulfilling ethical obligations.

- A. The purpose of the group is to improve interpersonal relationships.
- B. Types of techniques that will be employed.
  1. Nondirective
  2. Encounter
  3. T-group
- C. Education, training, experience of leaders.
- D. No fees for services.
- E. Responsibilities of leaders and participants.
  1. The leaders will suggest exercises that help to achieve the stated goals.
  2. The participant is free to decline to participate in such exercises and to leave the group at any time.
- F. Explanation of confidentiality regarding the group process.
  1. For leaders.
  2. For participants.
- G. Opportunity to discuss the terms of the information statement before signing.

II. Demographic data and anxiety-alleviating topics.

- A. Age and classification.
- B. Sex.
- C. State and country of residence.
- D. Ordinal position among siblings.
- E. Major
- F. Interest areas

III. Survey of attitudes and ideas about group participation.

A. Reasons for wanting to participate.

1. Realism of interviewee's goals.

a. Improve interpersonal skills.

b. Get in better contact with personal feelings.

c. Other goals considered realistic by interviewer.

2. Unrealistic goals.

a. To find lasting happiness.

b. To become a radically different person.

c. Other goals considered unrealistic by interviewer.

B. Prior participation in groups.

1. Prior participation.

2. Was experience positive or negative.

C. Expectations about the group process itself.

1. Realistic notion that effort is necessary to improve self.

2. Osmotic-magic cure-all for whatever ails you.

3. Other.

D. Anticipated risk involved in group participation.

1. Reasonable awareness of damage to self or others if group discloses too much or reacts too negatively.

2. No awareness of possible psychological damage due to group participation.

3. Unsure.

IV. Test for schizoid, anti-social, or psychotic tendencies.

A. Mental status exam.

1. Behavior during interview.

a. General appearence and behavior

b. Activity level.

2. Affect during interview.

a. hostile.

b. labile.

c. passive.

d. average.

3. Presence of delusions, hallucinations, or paranoid ideation.

4. Possibility for suicide and/or severe depression.

5. How interviewee views self in comparison with average UM student.

B. Survey of current social pattern.

1. Open-ended questions about extracurricular activities.

a. Social groups.

b. Dating.

c. Number of friends.

d. Withdrawn and/or highly inhibited.

2. Attitude toward best friend.

3. Interviewee's satisfaction with his current pattern of social interaction.

Appendix 2

Questions on the Post-Session Group Evaluation

1. Who do you think benefited the most from tonight's session? Why?
2. Who do you think benefited the least from tonight's session? Why?
3. What did you like most about the session?
4. What did you like least about the session?
5. Was the group too structured, too "planned out", by the leaders?
6. Was the group structured enough?
7. Did you feel at all uncomfortable because you did not know what was expected of you?
8. Did you feel comfortable saying things to the group?
9. Was there enough time for spontaneous discussion in tonight's session?
10. Do you have any suggestions for what we might do next week? Also, any additional comments you have will be appreciated.

Appendix 3

Questions on the Final Group Evaluation

1. In your opinion, what three or four people got the most out of the group?
2. Who seemed to benefit least from the group?
3. In your opinion, was anybody hurt by the group? Did we really turn anybody off?
4. What things did you like most about the group?
5. What things did you like least about the group?
6. Were the leaders too directive? Why? Why not?
7. Were the leaders too non-directive? Why? Why not?
8. How would you have changed the leaders' way of handling the group?
9. We will be running groups in the future. Therefore, any additional comments or suggestions you have as to how we might improve our performance as leaders will be appreciated.